



**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES**  
*Maryland's Social Services Agency*



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**DHR USHERS IN NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH BY  
APPLAUDING FAMILIES FROM THE CENTRAL MARYLAND AREA**

*Anne Arundel, Carroll, Harford and Howard Counties name families of the year*

**BALTIMORE** – The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) got a head start on celebrating National Adoption Awareness month by honoring families from **Anne Arundel, Carroll, Harford and Howard Counties** that contributed to the **770 total adoptions** finalized during fiscal year 2009.

“We have much to celebrate,” said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald. We have seen a 15 percent reduction in the overall number of children in foster care; a 43 percent decline in group home placements; we have recruited 1,500 new foster parents since 2007; and we found families for 770 children during our last fiscal year.”

The successes Donald highlighted were driven by the Department’s **Place Matters** initiative. This initiative builds on the premise that nothing matters more to a child than a place to call home.

Each of the local departments of social services honored families from their jurisdiction that adopted during the last year. These families were recognized for their commitment to adoption, their support of the agency’s goals, and their efforts to produce the best possible outcomes for children. Central Maryland jurisdictions honored the following families:

**Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services** recognized **Mark and Lisa Walinski**.

The Walinskis adopted Tatianna, a 16-year-old friend of their biological daughter. Tatianna had a long history of abuse -- but the Walinski family has helped her know the safety and security of a loving family. They supported and encouraged her education and encouraged Tatiana to develop friendships and helped raise her self-esteem. When Tatiana wanted to contact her birth mother, the Walinskis supported her decision.

Tatianna is now on the honor roll, plays high school field hockey and softball and last summer went to law camp to prepare for her future as an attorney.

-More-

- Martin O’Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brenda Donald, Secretary

**Carroll County Department of Social Services** recognized **Marshall and Chrissie Thompson.**

When Timmy entered foster care at age 11, he was dealing with the recent death of his mother, aunt and grandfather. His grandmother faced serious health issues and later passed away. Over the years, both the Thompsons and Timmy dealt with serious personal issues...Timmy had behavioral challenges...the Thompsons' lost their home in a fire and Mr. Thompson had a life-threatening motorcycle accident. After all of the difficulties, during a visit last year, Tim asked the Thompsons if they would adopt him. The Thompsons agreed and adopted Tim at age 17.

**Harford County Department of Social Services** recognized **Robert and Yvonne Cossey.**

Mr. and Mrs. Cossey have been licensed foster/adoptive parents for two years. Prior to moving to Maryland, they were foster and adoptive parents in Colorado. In 2009, the Cosseys adopted three special needs children. Two of them are siblings: Malik who is seven and Keyshawn who is five. And then there's little Justin, age two. In September 2009, the Cossey's took Justin's infant sibling into their home as a foster care placement. They have always attempted to have positive interactions with the children's birth parents and have gone out of their way to ensure that the children in their care participate in a variety of experiences. The Cossey family exceeded all expectations of what it means to be a great family.

**Howard County Department of Social Services** recognized **Ms. Deirdre Henderson.**

Deirdre Henderson adopted six year old Allie after Allie came to her home as a foster care placement. She has never wavered in her love and commitment to doing what was best for Allie. Oftentimes this meant dealing with a birth parent who attempted to disrupt the adoption process. Ms. Henderson has also been very supportive of the Howard County Department of Social Services and has worked with them throughout the entire process to ensure that Allie's best interests were kept at the forefront.

The celebration for the families was held at the Baltimore Zoo's Mansion House. In addition to an awards luncheon for their contributions, the families were also treated to an afternoon at the zoo with their children. "This is our 13<sup>th</sup> year of celebrating adoptions with an awards luncheon, but our families will tell you the biggest reward for them was being able to add these wonderful children to their families," Donald stated.

Additional information about this year's honorees can be found by visiting the DHR newsroom at [www.dhr.state.md.us](http://www.dhr.state.md.us) and clicking on the "Newsroom" tab on the left side of the page.

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**The 2009 Families of the Year from jurisdictions across the state include:**

Allegany County	Eugene and Jeanne Miller
Anne Arundel County	Mark and Lisa Walinski
Baltimore City	Donald and Arnissa Ames Brandi Beckner Jim and Julia Forest Avan Howard Mark and Judy Schlothauer
Baltimore County	Jason and Donna Neidinger
Calvert County	Jerry-y and Mary Lee
Caroline County	Ron and Vicky Marquess
Carroll County	Marshall and Chrissie Thompson
Cecil County	Rick and Marianne Shull
Charles County	Lionel and Shelia Carroll
Dorchester County	Joseph and Glenda Smith
Frederick County	Douglas and Maureen Garlock
Garrett County	Danny and Barbara Baker
Harford County	Robert and Yvonne Cossey
Howard County	Deirdre Henderson
Montgomery County	Charlie and Jenni Weller
Prince George's County	Darla Sligh
Queen Anne's County	Mark and Darla Verdonck
St. Mary's County	Gary and Vickie Ferko
Somerset County	Jonathan and Cherry Conley
Talbot County	Deborah Fletcher
Washington County	Tom and Toni Barnhart
Wicomico County	Scott and Amy Ness
Worcester County	Augustine Cook

The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; and provide temporary cash, food stamps and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, migrant workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 638,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.

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